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SUBJECT: BOUTERSE UNITES OPPOSITION, TARGETS 2010 ELECTIONS

REF: Paramaribo 00120

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On July 5, former military strongman and current murder defendant Desi Bouterse's National Democratic Party (NDP) officially formed a so-called mammoth bloc uniting five opposition political parties. An audience of several thousand attended the lively mass meeting where they were told that the bloc intends to move Suriname to the left. Although the current government is deeply unpopular, victory still will not be easy for the mammoth bloc with its history of criminality and economic mismanagement.
END SUMMARY.

Famous Faces, Familiar Rhetoric

¶2. (U) On July 5, the mammoth bloc - the popular term for the new political combination that has no official name as yet - was officially brought to life at a National Democratic Party (NDP)-style rally. The combination consists of the NDP led by Desi Bouterse, the Democratic National Platform 2000 (DNP-2000) led by former President Jules Wijdenbosch, the Party for Development and Democracy (BVD) led by wealthy businessman Dilip Sardjoe, the Progressive Workers and Farm Laborers Union (PALU) led by intellectual Jim Hok, and the Party of National Unity and Solidarity led by Javanese splinter-politician Willy Soemita. The five chairmen underlined the importance of unity in politics and criticized the Venetiaan/Sardjoe government for their gas, food, housing, and education policies. Dilip Sardjoe predicted that the new combination would win at least 40 of the 51 seats in Parliament.

Invocations: from Sinatra to Guevara, Obama to Chavez

¶3. (U) A predominantly youthful audience of a few thousand attended the mass meeting in the NDP party center. It featured performances by popular music groups, with Bouterse appearing on stage singing I did it my way and repeatedly using Barack Obama's yes we can election slogan. Bouterse, wearing a Che Guevara t-shirt (he is an admirer of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavz), told his audience that it is time to make South America more red. Referring to elections in Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina, Bouterse reiterated that it was time for Suriname to also move to the left.

Coalition Skepticism

¶4. (SBU) Kortencia Sumter-Griffith, one of the leading ladies within President Runaldo Venetiaan's NPS (National Party of Suriname), told Embassy staff that Bouterse's speech was nothing but populist rhetoric and that he was only able to draw such large crowds because of the popular music bands. Sumter - Griffith predicted the combination would not last since neither Bouterse nor Wijdenbosch,

whose relationship has run the gambit from personal friends to foes and are now back together again, would not accept the other's political leadership. Guno Castelen, Member of Parliament and Secretary of the Labor Party, suggested the new combination could pose a threat to the ruling coalition. He pointed out, however, that the Venetiaan government has brought economic stability and said he does not think that voters will opt for the inflation and corruption that the 1996 - 1999 government, led by the NDP with Wijdenbosch as President, was known for.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT. While it is true the New Front Plus coalition led by President Venetiaan brought back economic stability and rule of law that was absent under Wijdenbosch's leadership, Venetiaan's government remains deeply unpopular. The mammoth bloc has yet to present an election platform but enjoys popular support across a broad demographic. Yet victory also will not be easy for the bloc. The Surinamese voter tends to vote against rather than for, and whether it votes against the current villains of President Venetiaan and his supposedly do-nothing government or against the older villains of blood-and-drug-stained Bouterse and his bloc is a question whose answer will be another two years in the making. END COMMENT.

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